

# 17 Questions on Theodore Roosevelt Park Elk Management Action

In late September Governor John Hoeven and Senator Byron Dorgan announced that the National Park Service and the state of North Dakota had reached an understanding allowing skilled volunteers, working in teams, to assist with removal of elk from Theodore Roosevelt National Park.

After that announcement, on Oct. 5 NPS Director of Operations Daniel N. Wenk provided official responses to 17 questions previously posed by Game and Fish Department Director Terry Steinwand.

The federal mandated process regarding the park elk management plan is still ongoing. The NPS must evaluate more than 11,000 comments received on the draft Environmental Impact Statement, then conduct another public hearing. Following that, NPS will develop a Record of Decision that will finalize its plans for managing the elk herd in TRNP, and publish the Record of Decision in the Federal Register.

It is anticipated this will be completed late this year or early in 2010. Actual reduction of elk will not begin until the fall of 2010 at the earliest.

Following are the 17 Game and Fish questions (in bold type) and the NPS response (verbatim).

***How many people would comprise a team and what would individual responsibilities be?***

A team would consist of at least one NPS representative (team leader) and up to 4 volunteers. Responsibilities would include locating elk, shooting, field dressing, collecting samples for Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) and other testing, and packing the carcass(s) out of the field. Multiple teams may be in the field in different areas at the same time.

***What does "supervised and directed by NPS personnel" mean?***

The NPS representative(s) will be with the team in all stages of the action – shooting, data collection, field dressing, and packing. NPS staff would ensure that only cow elk were taken and may or may not indicate a specific animal or animals, depending on the conditions. Staff would determine how many animals are taken at a given time. The team would work together to determine other specifics, such as the best approach and which person would do the shooting.

***What qualifications are required for team leaders?***

Team leaders will be temporary or

permanent NPS (or other government) employees that meet the same qualifications as the team members. They also will be familiar with badlands terrain and park operations and will have additional training in first aid, radio operations, volunteer supervision, use of firearms, CWD testing and other procedures developed for the elk reduction program.

***What if the NPS cannot secure enough qualified team leaders?***

The NPS will secure sufficient resources, including team leaders, to accomplish program objectives.

***What are considered appropriate skills and proficiencies and how would these be determined?***

Appropriate skills to be evaluated would be firearms proficiency and a certain level of physical fitness. Firearm proficiency would consist of shooting at a standard 8-inch large-bore paper target at 200 yards. Shooting would take place from field positions chosen by the volunteer (kneeling, sitting, standing, or with a bipod) – bench shooting would not be allowed. Shooters would be required to place 3 consecutive shots within the target. Volunteers would need to be in good physical condition and understand that the activity will be very strenuous in rough terrain and variable weather conditions. Those not meeting the requirements would not be considered. Volunteers assisting with data collection and sampling and other tasks would have different qualifications that have not yet been developed.

***Would teams be required to remove elk by foot, horse, or hand pulled carts?***

It is likely that most carcasses would have to be removed with backpacks because of the rough terrain. Hand carts would not be used in the designated wilderness area, but could be used in some situations. However, their utility for transporting carcasses in the badlands is extremely limited due to terrain. Horses may be an option, but details regarding cost and logistics have not yet been evaluated.

***Would each of the skilled volunteers be able to remove one elk or would they be required to remove multiple elk?***

This would depend on the number of elk encountered and various other factors. For example, if several elk are encountered where access and removal would be relatively easy, then it is likely that more than one elk could be taken by a single volunteer or team. This will increase the efficiency by taking multiple animals in light of the need to take 275/year. In other instances, access may dictate that only a single elk should be taken by the entire team. Factors that would figure into this



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decision would be proximity to a road, terrain, time of day (how much daylight is available to get the carcass out), and weather conditions. The goal of the program is to remove as many elk as possible with the least amount of effort. Shooting more than one animal at a time would be the most efficient way to accomplish this goal.

***How will it be determined whether the meat is donated to a state agency, Tribe, or approved charity?***

If the NDGF partners with the NPS, the park would transfer the majority of the meat to NDGF and the agency could then make the decision to donate the meat to whomever they choose, including to the individuals that participated in the skilled volunteer program or to other people or organizations. The NPS would work with the NDGF to ensure that some meat is donated to Tribes and charities. If the NDGF declines to partner with the NPS, the park would look to donate the meat to other state agencies, Indian Tribes, charities or other approved organizations.

***What state agency would the meat be donated to?***

We would work with NDGF (if they participate) or other agencies on this. If the state does not want to participate, then meat would be donated to Tribes and charities.

***What are the Federal regulations regarding donation of meat?***

According to General Services Administration regulations regarding transfer of government property (elk carcasses in this case) to other entities, the federal government cannot transfer federal property to a private individual, but it can make transfers to various groups including other governmental entities (state, city, Tribal or other authority) and non-profit organizations.

***Would meat only be donated after CWD testing is complete?***

Yes. Meat would not be donated if the elk tested positive for CWD. We would hope the donating agency would use an "informed consent" form so everyone who receives meat understands issues surrounding the consumption of wild game. NPS would be willing to work with the state to develop such a form.

***What is the time frame between taking the CWD sample and release of the carcass?***

This time frame would be approximately 5 days. The NPS currently sends samples to a lab at Colorado State University that returns results in 2-4 days. We would establish agreements with the lab, to the extent possible, to provide results within a specified time frame.

***Will hunter success outside the park factor into the decision whether or not to implement another reduction method (such as roundup)?***

Hunter harvest outside the park (E-3/E-4) will be considered when program objectives and reduction goals are being evaluated.

***How many carcasses are to be left in the field and who determines which ones?***

As few carcasses as possible would be left in the field; however, a few of the animals shot may be left in the field if necessary. The NPS representative would make the decision. For example, if it were very late in the day, and an animal was shot in a steep draw, it might be decided to leave the animal in the field and attempts may be made to remove the animal at a later time.

***What is the time frame when the action would take place?***

Actions would generally take place in the fall/winter months. Actions likely would start after migratory elk have returned to the park, around the end of November. During this time, migratory animals would be available for removal, which would help reduce future issues with elk outside the park as fewer and fewer animals would leave the park in successive years. The removal period could run through the end of February if necessary. This would be prior to migratory elk leaving the park (late March and April), and to avoid concerns about harvesting animals in later stages of pregnancy.

***What are the goals of elk to be taken in a given year?***

As detailed in the release of the preferred alternative, and the Draft Environmental Impact Statement, an annual removal goal of 275 was established for the first 5 years of the plan. During the maintenance phase, the removal goal may fluctuate, depending on annual survey results and the number of elk necessary to maintain the desired population. In some years, it may not be necessary to remove any elk from the park. If the goals are met (or close), then the NPS would proceed with the alternative as indicated. If that goal is not met, then the NPS could continue to use direct reduction teams, but could also use the other methods listed in the preferred alternative.

*What do you think? To pass along your comments, send us an e-mail at [ndgf@nd.gov](mailto:ndgf@nd.gov); call us at (701) 328-6300; or write North Dakota Game and Fish Department, 100 N. Bismarck Expressway, Bismarck, ND 58501.*



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